

## How to Write an Overture on Re-Imagining PCC Structure

Overtures to the General Assembly are written with very specific wording and punctuation. Check a recent copy of the Acts and Proceedings for examples.

Begin with a title for the overture.

Add a series of factual background statements, each one beginning with the word "WHEREAS" and a comma (,) and ending with a semicolon (;).

Each statement ends with the word "and", except the last one.

The request statement begins with "THEREFORE" and a comma.

Then state your identity, e.g. "the Session of St. Andrew's, Yourtown,".

Add these words: "humbly overtures the Venerable, the 146th General Assembly to"

State the action that you want the General Assembly to consider, followed by a semicolon.

Finish with these words: "or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best."

### Brief Example:

Overture to the 146<sup>th</sup> General Assembly

Re: Restructuring the Presbyterian Church in Canada

WHEREAS, the issues pertaining to human sexuality are symptomatic of deeper theological issues; and

WHEREAS, our system of governance cannot function without a common basis of authority;

THEREFORE, the Session of St. Andrew's, Yourtown, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 146th General Assembly to restructure the denomination along theological lines; or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best.

Other examples can be found in three overtures already submitted by [St. Andrew's Moncton, Presbytery of Eastern Han-Ca](#), and [Grace West Hill](#).

### Possible elements for WHEREAS clauses:

WHEREAS, the effects of the current pandemic have been both negative and positive: negative in increasing isolation of presbyters who cannot meet in person; positive in leading presbyters to embrace electronic connectivity and virtual meetings, leading to greater ease in non-geographic-based communication and collaboration; and

WHEREAS, the effects of the remits on marriage and ordination adopted by the 145th General Assembly and submitted to presbyteries under the Barrier Act are to enshrine in church law and culture two very different understandings of marriage which if ultimately adopted require that space be found for those holding these different understandings to live and practice the same with integrity in Christian community, in both congregations and presbyteries; and

WHEREAS, the PCC does not need to be an entirely monolithic homogeneous unit, and there can be different expressions of Presbyterianism in Canada; and

WHEREAS, we seek congregations and presbyteries to exist with theological and pastoral integrity; and

WHEREAS, there is significant theological divergence in the PCC, currently under one structure; and

WHEREAS, there are differences of authority that are unsustainable in a monolithic structure, and

WHEREAS, there is a long-term trend of diminishing membership in the PCC (a reduction of 30,000 between 2010 and 2020), which would be further weakened by departures for theological reasons; and

WHEREAS, we are ethnically and theologically diverse and need to respect different voices in secure spaces, allowing for effective work and witness; and

WHEREAS, there is precedent for "elective-affinity presbyteries" (among Presbyterians in the United States in the 1830s) enabling those with differing theological convictions and practices to collaborate together, maintaining those convictions and practices within respective presbyteries while still functioning within one national General Assembly structure, at least for a time; and

WHEREAS, there are already existing presbyteries formed along a combination of geographical and non-geographical considerations (Eastern and Western HanCa); and

WHEREAS, there are 45 presbyteries in the PCC some of which are too unpopulated to be able to function effectively and optimally; and

WHEREAS, there are some congregations and presbyteries which are internally divided theologically, seriously impeding effective advances in ministry to fulfill Christ's mission; and

WHEREAS, there are some national functions that are common to all, regardless of theological considerations (e.g. pensions and benefits, Leading with Care policy, archives, PWS&D relief efforts, etc.):

### **Possible elements for a THEREFORE clause:**

THEREFORE, [the session or presbytery of \_\_\_\_\_] humbly overtures the Venerable, the 146<sup>th</sup> General Assembly to:

- take steps to form two synods, each national in scope, with autonomy in doctrinal issues, discipline, etc.;
  - enable the formation of presbyteries along generous regional and theological lines;
  - confine General Assembly responsibilities to matters common to both synods;
- or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best.

Other examples of THEREFORE clauses are included in three overtures already submitted by [St. Andrew's Moncton](#), [Presbytery of Eastern Han-Ca](#), and [Grace West Hill](#):

#1. THEREFORE, the Session of St. Andrew's Moncton humbly overtures the Venerable, the 146<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada to restructure the denomination along two theological lines, one theologically autonomous Synod each along traditional and revisionist lines, with General Assembly and national offices activities being limited to human resource matters such as pension, health and dental; mission and relief activities; and other mutually agreed upon activities and interests; allowing each Session to choose which Synod their congregation would affiliate with; or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best.

#2. THEREFORE, the Presbytery of Eastern Han-Ca humbly overtures the Venerable, the 146<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada to: Create a safeguarded, guaranteed and permanent place with theological separation in the form of a theologically and doctrinally

autonomous Synod where congregations that uphold the existing subordinate standards in the Han-Ca presbyteries and elsewhere can continue to be fully participating members in covenant with the Presbyterian Church in Canada, just as the presbyteries of Eastern and Western Han-Ca were formed along the basis of a distinct and separate language and culture in order that the ordained ministers, ruling elders, and congregations could fully participate in the denomination; or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best.

#3. THEREFORE, the Session of Grace, West Hill, Toronto, Ontario, humbly overtures the Venerable, the 146<sup>th</sup> General Assembly to seek a way forward, in the spirit of "Pathway C: One Denomination – Three Streams", presented in the 2019 report of the Special Committee of Former Moderators, to provide a safeguarded, guaranteed and permanent place in The Presbyterian Church in Canada where congregations and clergy with a traditional understanding of the Bible can continue to do ministry in this denomination in a manner which reflects the same character, identity, ethos, and core teachings that were the way of our denomination during the formation and adoption of our existing subordinate standards; or to do otherwise as the General Assembly, in its wisdom, deems best.